

13 WRITING AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

SHONDA RHIMES TEACHES WRITING FOR TELEVISION 27

“

I think one of the most important rules... is human beings rarely say exactly what they mean. —*Shonda Rhimes*

“

CHAPTER RECAP

Dialogue is one of the most important parts of the TV writing process. No word or piece of dialogue should be wasted, and each sentence needs to be carefully thought through and well crafted.

Dialogue is one of the best ways to reveal who your characters are. Shonda uses the examples of Cristina Yang's dialogue versus that of George O'Malley in *Grey's Anatomy* to show how the speech patterns of her characters were carefully calibrated and deliberately structured.

Learn to become better at writing dialogue by learning how people speak in real life. Observe conversations, note speech patterns, and see how mannerisms can reveal who a person is. Also notice the imperfect way real people speak; we don't finish our sentences, and often cut people off. Keep this information in the back of your mind as you write your own dialogue.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- ▶ Take Shonda's advice and deconstruct dialogue in other shows. Pick a character and study their language patterns. How does their dialogue reveal who that character is? What about scenes that don't have any dialogue in them? What makes them effective and why?
- ▶ Write a page summarizing their patterns with examples, and share with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

SUBCHAPTERS

- ▶ Deconstruct Dialogue in Other Shows
- ▶ Write Dialogue Like Real Conversations
- ▶ Don't Write Subtext as Dialogue
- ▶ Use Dialogue to Show Who Your Characters Are
- ▶ Actors and Dialogue

NOTES

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ASSIGNMENT

- ▶ Build out some “rules” of dialogue for one of the characters in your show. How do you envision that character talking on screen? Do they speak rapidly and are their sentences clean and cutting? Are they more flustered and soft-spoken? Why? How would this character approach expressing the statement, “I love you”?

NOTES